

Testimony of James Erfe, Stonington High School Student.

Good afternoon Co-Chair Gerratana, Co-Chair Dillon, Co-Chair Somers, and sub-committee members. My name is James Erfe, a Freshman at Stonington High School and a member of the Adolescent Learning & Leadership Institute (ALLI). ALLI was created by staff at the Southeastern Regional Action Council and it is a youth development and training program with almost 50 kids at our monthly meetings at schools. The mission is to empower young minds, educate them on contemporary issues and engage them in leadership opportunities in their community. In my first year participating, I have seen all these things addressed and more. If the cuts to SERAC's budget are approved, they would eliminate this program that has clearly made a change in my peers, which you can read in the letters sent from other ALLI students.

ALLI is important due to the fact that in the monthly school meeting (with all the schools), we address problem like drugs usage and drug overdose and how we can make a change. Many teens are always on the fence of whether or not they should take part in consuming drugs. Many are mainly scared that their parents will find out or that they'll get in trouble with the law. Many teens don't take into consideration that drugs can do a significant amount of damage to your body and can put your life in danger. In this program, we address the concerns many teens have, such as whether or not they should do drugs and what abusing drugs can do to you. We learn about how they affect your mind and body and why they are harmful in the lessons; those are followed with group projects to get all of our minds together to share our opinions on the topic and how we can spread prevention around schools in Southeastern CT.

With the budget being cut we can barely get transportation for the other schools to come and meet. This impedes our range of spreading awareness, due to the fact that there is no transportation (minimal cost for huge benefits). We address the consequences of making poor decisions, like causing damage to your brain, we learned how driving while under the influence can be fatal and you are not in control. Currently we are in workgroups creating campaigns and messages to spread drug awareness in the five towns that attend our meetings. I feel as if spreading awareness throughout the schools is incredibly important; I personally know a couple of people in my school system that use drugs and have issues in their lives and they are only in High School.

Personally I wasn't taught information about the negative effects of drug use to where I could do something about it. I don't feel I was really aware of how it all applied to me, while I know never to do them knowing the negative effects, it can also help me and others spread awareness throughout the Southeastern CT.. With this knowledge I have helped many people in the school that use drugs understand the effects and why they should not be consumed. In fact, I've actually persuaded some students to no longer use drugs. I am confident now in sharing the side effects and how these will negatively affect their future. I wouldn't have been able to make said difference in their lives if I had not been a part of the ALLI program and was not taught all of the effects of drugs. Please don't take these programs because they make a lasting influence on who we will become in the future. We are your next generation.

Sincerely,

James Erfe